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ABSTRACT

A consideration of real world language use yields five questions that could prove helpful in assessing student writing achievements: (1) What is the writer's purpose or intention? (2) What audience does the writer have in mind? (3) What are the organizing principles of the piece? (4) What range of experience and knowledge might one reasonably expect the writer to draw on? and (5) What specific uses of language are necessary, given the answers to the first four questions? A detailed analysis of several pieces of student writing in terms of these criteria suggests specific questions covering these areas that students should ask themselves in order to become better writers. (JL)

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ED220829

A RANGE OF INFORMATIVE WRITING

Discussion Booklet 3: a report on the 1982 C.E.E. English Cross-Moderation Exercise

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CS206893

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1982

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There will be five publications in this series of which this is No. 3. These are as follows:

No. 1: Criteria for Writing in English (this is available from the SREB's offices, price 25p).

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No. 4: Report on Grade I/III Imaginary Stories and criteria (it is intended that this booklet will be published later in 1982).

No. 5: Report on Grade I/III Arguments and Informative/ Guidance Documents, illustrating the range and the criteria that apply (it is intended that this booklet will be published later in 1982).

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PART I

Language and our everyday needs

Think of a teacher's average day. Wake up - switch on the radio - weather forecast: rain again! - news headlines - a quick scan of the front page and the sports news over cornflakes - the post arrives: details of a UNICEF appeal and the local party newsheet - check that the kids have got the things they need for school - on the car radio there's an interview and an eye-witness account from Poland - into the staffroom: quick look at the notices, check your pigeon-hole and pick up the school's weekly bulletin - remember to inform class about medicals and Fourth Year school journey meeting at 4.15 - a new girl: get the form captain to explain the ropes - assembly and announcements - LESSONS - lunchtime and a staff meeting reporting on the latest cuts - MORE LESSONS - end of school: see deputy about arrangements for parents' meeting - home: hear kids' account of their day - one wants help on a project: where to get facts on local housing? - give wife a summary of the staff meeting - MARKING - an interesting article in the paper - phone call: friend's son wants advice on applying to university - watch documentary on police - television news... think: what have I to sort out for tomorrow?

A day like this is chock full of producing and receiving language, to get us through the day and to let us (and others) know what is going on. Looked at this way it is kaleidoscopic. There seems to be a bewildering range of different uses of language, and often we have to make a quick switch from one to another - drawing on quite different kinds of competence. We have to be good at sizing up each situation in order to be effective within it.

As teachers of English we inevitably have a responsibility to help people understand what they are facing and how best to cope. Is there a straightforward way of arranging what feels like an avalanche of language demands, in order to form a pattern that helps us make better sense of what has to be learnt?

A pattern of purposes and demands

Just to get a start, let us try to think of the kinds of questions that would elicit much of that "everyday language."

- How do you do it? This commonly leads to a set of instructions.

- How does it work? - and why do it that way? Here the typical answer would be an explanation.
- What should I (we) do? - and how? This produces advice, guidance, and possibly warnings.
- What must I remember? - or bear in mind? As often as not the answer is a list.
- What was said (at a meeting) or written in various reports? In a written answer we may expect minutes or a summary.
- What does it mean? Some interpretation is called for.
- What are the facts? Although this may simply involve factual recall and report, it may also demand a form of enquiry (leading to investigative reporting).
- What did you observe or encounter? - what happened? This suggests a narrative report.
- What exactly does it look like? - what are its characteristics? This calls for some kind of objective description.

That is a start. But there are dangers if we try to make the system too neat. First of all, this is not the full range of questions. Second, questions relate to a context and take on different nuances as a result; their significance is not as clear-cut as it may appear here. And third, in everyday life, one question leads to another, and even within the one more than one purpose may be implied. You think that you are being asked for instructions but you find you have to include explanations - and even objective descriptions, perhaps.

So much for purposes. But the actual demands on our language are also affected by the listener/reader. The way we judge their needs affects the style and form of language we use: the degree of detail, the need for concreteness (or freedom to use abstractions), the vocabulary or terms we assume familiarity with, the simplicity or complexity of the structures...

What can we learn from this as teachers?

We have been discussing things that happen naturally in everyday life. So to begin with we teachers have to try to find ways of bringing this range of language demands not too artificially into our day-to-day lessons. There have to be real (or simulated) moments when people ask the student: how do you do it?... what should I bear in mind?... what are the facts? And the student has to feel confident enough (with help) of making a shot at answering.

Help may be of at least three kinds:

(a) to see what the question implies, whether it is a simple purpose (give me a set of instructions), or a more complex one (and I'd be interested for you to explain and advise me as you go along);

(b) to understand the range of resources in personal experience and public knowledge that the student could draw on, check for accuracy, and decide to select;

(c) to realise what degree of detail the listener/reader may need, and the problems which may arise if the language used is not appropriately selected and organised.

So much for preparation; now let us consider the outcomes. In everyday life, when people didn't read the staff notice board, or dreamed off in assembly, or didn't clearly explain where the meeting was to be held, awkward and sometimes unpleasant consequences followed. Conversely, when people listened carefully or gave clear advice, life went more smoothly. So this is language (productive or receptive) that frequently gives you a form of feedback.

It follows that when students are producing talks or written pieces for similar purposes in the classroom, the natural outcome is to try out what they have to say with an appropriate "audience". The feedback from such an audience will give useful indications about successes and failures in the language produced. Mind you, the audience reaction may be too vague and generalised to help the student diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses in what has been written or said.

More likely than not, the teacher has an important role to play, if the student's competence is to be improved. S/he will need to point to key features that have affected the audience's response at different moments, and that implies having a set of criteria to act as a focus and a grid to make clear what has been achieved and what may still be lacking.

In analysing these uses of language, as we have just done, it seemed to us that there were at least five criteria that could prove helpful in assessing the student's achievements.

Suggested criteria

1. FIRST: What purpose(s) or intention(s) has the writer in mind? Looking back at the questions on page 2, is there a single purpose

or is it mixed? (It does help students if they are invited to formulate the underlying question(s) for themselves.)
THEN: Does there seem to be a clear and unified sense of purpose overall?

2. FIRST: What (type of) audience has the writer in mind?
THEN: What understanding is shown of that audience's needs and interests?

3. FIRST: What are the organising principle(s) of the piece (e.g. a list, a narrative, a set of instructions, stages in a process...)
THEN: Is the organisation clear and coherent for the reader?

4. FIRST: What range of experience and knowledge (personal and public) might one reasonably expect the writer to draw on?
THEN: How adequate is the selection that has been made - and how accurate is the information?

5. FIRST: What specific uses of language are necessary, given the topic, the purpose(s), the audience, and the chosen form of organisation?
THEN: How well has the writer been able to cope with these specific uses of language and conventions?
IN ADDITION: What kinds of diagram or illustration are helpful or necessary, and how appropriately have they been used and related to the text?

The ideas so far were part of our preparatory work for a further Cross-Moderation seminar with the CEE English examiners. The next step was to test these ideas in seminar, to see how well they applied to examples of students' writing drawn from CEE course work folders. Part 2 is based on the results of this seminar.

PART 2 The Seminar

1. A Layman's Guide to Jewellery-making

Putting the students into the role of expert is a powerful way of encouraging writing that is committed and with a ring of authority about it. They already have the experience and knowledge to draw on, and the enterprise gives them a feeling of the sorts of role we want them to take on in society. As it happens, layman's guides, and similar products, are already an important element in the spectrum of writing encouraged by certain boards. So it is important to be clear about the kinds of achievement one is looking for.

The specific example we selected was organised into seven sections, together with a bibliography. In other words it was equivalent to a booklet! For the purposes of the seminar we looked at three sections in depth - each one - as it happened, illustrated a different purpose. Let us start by looking at the Introduction.

1 (a) Introduction

Many people would think that jewellery making is expensive and difficult. But it depends on how much money you have to spend on it. If you did not have much money you could make something very cheaply with copper, and move on to silver wire and silver when you have been through the basic processes and think you have mastered them successfully. This is why some people practice with copper. Also it can be a waste of time and money if you make something and it goes wrong, although you will probably be able to use the material (copper, silver, brass, nickel silver) for something else.

It does not have to be difficult. This depends on what you aim to make. A ring is fairly easy to start with and includes soldering (which is joining the two ends of metal together). From there you could move on to more difficult things gradually.

Another reason why people like making their own jewellery is because they can design something they want, that maybe unusual, and is not in the shops, or copied from a piece from a shop with a stone or attachment they prefer.

Jewellery making is something that you have to be patient with, you should not expect to get something finished in one day. It needs to be done slowly and carefully to get it neatly finished with no rough edges or scratches.

An introduction can take many forms. In this case, when the Seminar looked closely at it, the student has begun by Advocating. In other words this begins as a form of Argument, a topic we were all familar with from

our previous seminar (1). We quickly felt that the choice was appropriate: given what looks like a highly technical subject the layman might well feel inadequate. It makes good sense for the writer, therefore, to take explicit account of this uncertainty, to reassure readers right from the start, "set them at ease" and "entice them to go on." Thus:-

- Many people would think...expensive and difficult
- BUT... if you do not have much money you could make...
- It does not have to be difficult...
- Another reason why people like making...

We have already discussed Arguments and their criteria in some detail, so here we will simply comment briefly on one or two of the more significant features.

It is not a complex argument: the idea "that jewellery making is expensive and difficult" is refuted in a confident way, and the reader is personally reassured: "If you do not have... you could make something..." The writer then adds a positive reason "why people like making their own", and ends with a piece of advice: "You have to be patient..." Argument and advice do seem to be unified within an overall sense of purpose, and the tone to the reader (1) is just right, we felt.

The paragraphing makes clear to the reader the general structure of the "argument" but we did notice one lapse in coherence at the opening of paragraph three - "Another reason why." This is the one point where the reader is momentarily confused, as there has been no mention of an initial reason! In effect, this slip suggests that, as she tried to make the bridge from refutations to a positive argument, the writer had to struggle for control. Perhaps we should add that more experienced writers also learn to signal the transition from persuasive argument to advice or warnings (so that the final paragraph might well begin "Mind you," or "Of course, you have to realise that...").

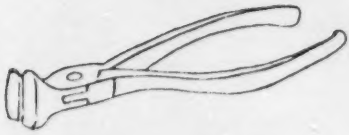
In general, then, the purposes were clear and the audience's needs kept well in mind. The Introduction fulfills its purpose.

I (b) The Tools and Materials to Use

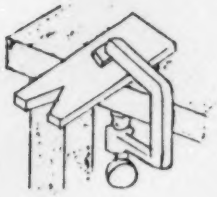
It is best to buy a few tools to start with if you are starting yourself, and gradually adding to them. Here I have made a list of the most

useful ones to buy.

Round nosed pliers

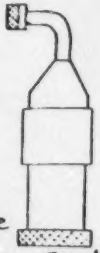


End cutters



Bench peg or pin

File



Flame or Blow Torch

Tweezers.

Round nosed pliers are used to curl the wire. The size of the curl depends on the position of the wire in the jaws of the pliers. A small curl is made with the wire at the front of the pliers and a larger one with the wire at the back of the pliers. Place the wire in the pliers, and make a curl trying not to regrip the wire.

The end cutters cut wire.

The bench peg or pin is a piece of wood which is attached to a table by a screw. It is used as a work surface for steadying an object whilst filing or sawing.

A file is essential. You need it to file away rough edges of metal which you frequently have to do.

A flame torch is used when soldering pieces of metal together. They are run on methylated spirits and the flame can be made stronger for using on bigger articles. Flux is needed to clean the metal before soldering so the solder will run evenly onto the other side. Sometimes a small core of flux is put inside lead solder but usually you will have to buy flux separately in a liquid or paste form for soldering silver together. A pair of tweezers is a help to move the melted solder onto the other side of the join. Steel or brass tweezers are best as aluminium ones will melt. They are also used to move hot pieces into cold water. These tools and materials are all necessary for soldering.

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It is best to start with wire then moving onto sheet metal. The wire and sheet metal can be bought at plumbers shops and jewellery making suppliers.

I usually make items in silver so I shall explain about working with silver, and how to buy it. There are two types of silver, fine and sterling. Fine silver is pure silver; it can be hammered into shape, is flexible, tough and can be worked by hand. To make it harder you have to add other metals to make an alloy (mixture of metals). Sterling silver has copper added to make it a stronger alloy, it must contain 92% fine silver. Silver can also be bought from a silversmith and is in many different sizes, shapes, and thicknesses. Silver wire is bought by the millimetre. And silver sheet is measured in the metric system of gram weight. The terms used are;

24 grains = I pennyweight (dwt)
20 dwt = I ounce troy
12 ounces troy = I pound troy
(I ounce troy = 1.1 ounce Avoir = 31.1gm).

In discussing this section we took each of our criteria in turn.

What purposes? The section opens by making the initial question explicit: what tools need to be bought as a start? What follows, as the writer says, is going to be "a list" which names each tool and briefly explains its use. The main "material", silver, is introduced at the end of the list together with a good deal of advice and information relevant to buying it. So the unifying purpose is to explain what to buy, and why.

What audience in mind? Obviously the illustrations assume no initial knowledge on the audience's part: they offer the simplest way of describing an unknown object. The writer has then tried to decide where it is enough to state the use of the tool very briefly - "The end cutters cut wire" - and where to elaborate rather more fully, in the case of the "round nosed pliers" even instructing how to use them ("Place the wire...").

Where technical terms are introduced, these are normally explained in simple terms - thus, "alloy (mixture of metals)" and "two types of silver, fine and sterling." Should "flux" also be explained? - we realised that it was not always easy to decide.

The personal address to the reader is continued, and the relationship is all the more personal when the writer comments "I usually make items in silver..." This was felt to be entirely appropriate, and in keeping with the overall encouraging tone.

What organising principles? The main structure, as the writer makes explicit, is a list. However, when she reaches the flame torch the writer tacitly

realises that it is worth grouping this with the other tools and materials needed for soldering - flux and tweezers. It is a more complex paragraph, in part dealing with soldering as a process, and thus moving away from the list structure; however, she recovers with the hindsight comment that "These tools and materials are all necessary for soldering."

In a sense the final two paragraphs form an addendum to the list, and the writer does make this reasonably clear by explicitly saying: "so I shall explain about working with silver, and how to buy it."

With any list there are going to be questions about the best internal order. It is not hard to see why cutters follow pliers, for example. On the other hand, in deciding to treat soldering within the paragraph, the writer momentarily loses her way - introducing the flame torch before the flux, and missing the fact that solder is a further item in the list. (The same faltering in control leads her further into the process of soldering than she needs to go at this moment.) Nevertheless, the main thrust of the structure is clear.

What range of experience and knowledge? A good deal of what the writer has got from public knowledge is internalised here as personal knowledge, the seminar felt. This suggests that she has quite a lot of experience to draw on, and that it has already been verbally articulated in her own mind. "She knows what she's talking about," as we say. Writing for a layman calls for a complex understanding of the subject, in order to make an appropriate selection of the simpler elements. This writer has demonstrated she can do this. "Buy a few tools to start with...the most useful ones", "It is best to start with wire"... "I shall explain about working with silver."

If there is one undigested chunk of public knowledge it shows in the movement from grams to troy weight, at the very end.

What specific uses of language? We have already mentioned a number of significant features: the personal voice and the explanations for technical terms, for instance. One other attractive feature was noted. When the writer wants to do so, she is not afraid to put down an elementary sentence and leave it at that.

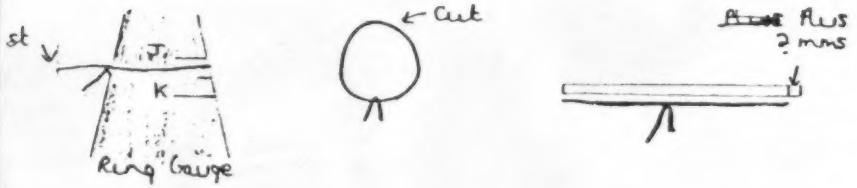
The end cutters cut wire.

Equally, she can handle more complex information in a clear, direct style: "Fine silver is pure silver; it can be hammered into shape, is flexible, tough and can be worked by hand." Two minor lapses in the grammar ("adding," "moving") suggest that she is still experimenting with more complex sentence structures.

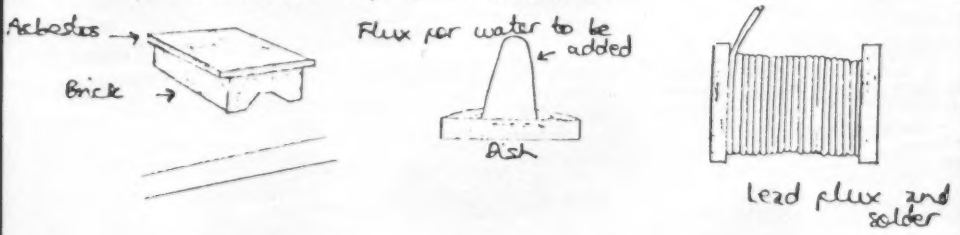
Finally, the seminar felt that the drawings were neat and clear, adding a significant contribution to the list.

1 (c) How to Make a Silver Ring

Cut a piece of wire two millimetres longer than the width of your finger. You can do this by wrapping a thin piece of wire around a ring gauge at your correct ring size, cutting the wire and smoothing it out, then cutting the wire you want to make the ring with to the same length (plus two millimetres).



Next file away the rough edges of both ends, (this is what the two millimetres extra was for), so as they will meet when joined together. Take the round nosed pliers and place the silver in the middle of them, take a grip and twist the silver. It does not matter if it is not a perfect circle. Now the soldering has to be done. Soldering needs to be done on a special surface, or the flame from the blow torch will harm your table. First you will need a small sheet of asbestos, about 6" x 4" and 1/4" thick, which can be obtained at retailers dealing in jeweller's tools or at some local tool shops. And to keep the heat away from the table find bricks to put around the asbestos, and one underneath it.



Place the ring on the asbestos and apply flux to the two ends you want to join together. Heat the flux with the blow torch. And then drop the ring into some hot pickle (a acid solution used for cleaning): In a few minutes it should be ready to be taken out and then dropped into some cold water. Here the tweezers are useful if the pickle is boiling. Dry the ring with a paper towel and put back on the asbestos. Apply some flux again and cut a very small piece of lead solder.

o ⟵ about this much solder.

And place it on one side of the join. Heat the ring on the opposite side to which you placed the solder, and it should run evenly over the two ends.

Lift the ring with the tweezers into the pickle and then the cold water. Place it on a ring gauge or cone shape and hammer around lightly, until you have the round shape you want.

What purposes? This time there is a single purpose, to instruct the layman in a new process. The only flicker of deviation is the advice on where to buy the asbestos.

What audience in mind? There is the same effort to keep the layman in mind:

- (this is what the two millimetres extra was for)
- It does not matter if it is not a perfect circle.
- Now the soldering has to be done
- about this much solder
- Until you have the round shape you want

These are nice examples of strategies that confidentially explain (in passing), give cheerful advance notice or a practical tip, and end up with the feeling that you've got the achievement "you want".

What organising principles? The basic structure is a sequence of instructions:

Cut a piece of wire
Next file away the rough edges
Take the round nosed pliers...and twist the silver
Place the ring on the asbestos
Heat the flux
Drop the ring into
Dry the ring.... etc.

Within this structure there are two major interpolations, one refining on the instruction ("You can do this by wrapping a thin piece...") the other introducing some further material omitted from the earlier list ("Soldering needs to be done on a special surface...which can be obtained..."). The interpolations cause the writer some minor problems, which we will discuss shortly under Language. However, the main sequence is clear and correct, and the overall structure is perfectly understandable.

What range of experience and knowledge? As we have already said, the writer is confidently drawing on complex personal experience. It's because the experience is personal that, as the seminar noted, she is able to give her instructions as if the process was "going on in front of you, and you were actually working with the materials." As someone said, "It's like being instructed in a television programme - like cookery."

What specific use of language? The instructions start rather elaborately but progress to little more than imperatives by the end - a sensible economy. What's particularly neat is the interweaving of straight instruction with encouraging comments and personal touches ("...twist the silver. It does not matter if it is not a perfect circle.")

Again the technical language is well handled in the main; there is one moment ("width") when the everyday word does not convey the precise sense; "circumference" would have been better.

As we mentioned earlier, structural problems produce a slight tension at two other places. In the first interpolation the need to fit three actions into a sentence produces some awkwardness: "You can do this by wrapping... cutting... and smoothing... then cutting..." In the second interpolation the details about obtaining the asbestos are well handled but the flow from before the interpolation to after it rather defeats her: "First you will need a small sheet... And to keep the heat away from the table, find bricks..."

The diagrams are not uniformly so well placed or so clear. The first set of drawings would be better placed running down the page with the text alongside them (this time they are attempting to illustrate a process, not just a list of objects). Several people found the ring gauge diagram puzzling, and others wondered why flux should have been introduced at all in the second set.

SUMMING UP on 1(a) - (c): Encouraging students to write on subjects where they have personal expertise gives them a confident base to operate from.

There is a better chance that the demands of the various purposes and of the audience will be met, because the student is at ease with the subject matter.

In this case, a practical guide has raised the need for quite a range of purposes - to advocate, warn, explain, instruct, describe, advise, remind... - and we would expect to find a similar variety in other such guides. The grouping of these purposes into sections, and within sections into paragraphs with different functions, must constitute a very important step forward in learning to write.

This kind of enterprise demands that a student clarifies and sorts out what s/he knows and understands about the subject, and organises it appropriately to tell others. It's an important challenge to learn to write at length and to recognise the need for macro-and micro- organisation.

Finally, attitudes as well as knowledge are important. Being able both to instruct and to build confidence is a delicate art. Are we always aware that in everyday life facts in themselves are not enough? - one has to work with people.

* * * *

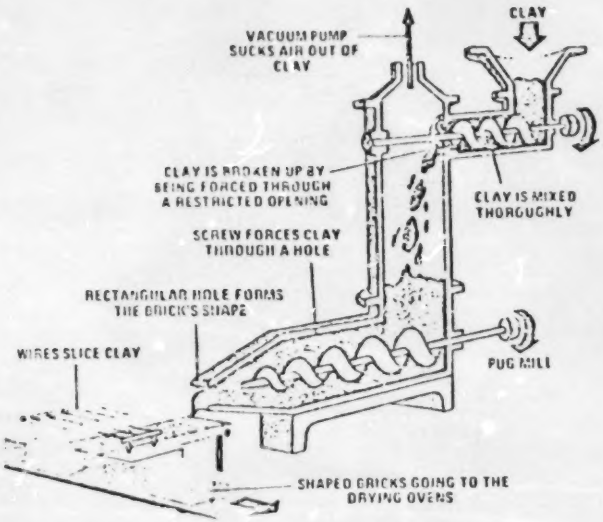
2. From Clay to Bricks

We selected the next example from the folders because the teacher had so obviously put a good deal of thought into it. At first sight, certainly, it seemed to have a lot of potential. The briefing for the class ran as follows:

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO

This brick furnace receives hundreds of visitors a year, and to ease the job of explaining to the visitors the basic operations, the management has decided to have a tape-recording made. The visitors will be able to listen through their headphones.

Your job is to use the information in the diagram as the basis for your commentary on what is happening in front of the visitors. OBVIOUSLY, IN THIS EXAMINATION YOU ARE GOING TO WRITE THE TEXT, BUT MAKE IT CLOSE TO SPEECH. YOU MUST TRY TO MAKE IT AN INFORMAL, FRIENDLY STYLE. DO NOT BE OVER-FAMILIAR, BUT REMEMBER THAT IT IS A "SPOKEN" TEXT NOT A "WRITTEN" ONE. DON'T FORGET,TOO, THAT THE VISITORS WILL HAVE THE FULL-SCALE MACHINERY BEFORE THEIR EYES AS THEY ARE LISTENING TO YOUR TAPE.


CLAY
VACUUM PUMP SUCKS AIR OUT OF CLAY
CLAY IS BROKEN UP BY BEING FORCED THROUGH A RESTRICTED OPENING
CLAY IS MIXED THOROUGHLY
SCREW FORCES CLAY THROUGH A HOLE
RECTANGULAR HOLE FORMS THE BRICK'S SHAPE
WIRES SLICE CLAY
PUG MILL
SHAPED BRICKS GOING TO THE DRYING OVENS

In this simulation the teacher is trying to give a sense of a real context and audience, moving from school into the world of work. Let us look at a student whose overall ability was quite high, to see what he made of it.

Welcome to our brick factory. Here, bricks have been made for over hundreds of years. Our task of making the bricks has perpetually become easier, due to more up to date advanced technology.

The clay we use in our production of bricks is brought to us by outside companies specialising in obtaining large quantities of clay by methods such as mining. This clay is brought to us by lorry.

We are going to show you the various methods and processes through which clay has to pass before finally becoming a brick.

The first stage on its way to becoming a brick is the, clay being placed in a funnel shaped opening, where it falls through into a horizontal shaft. This is where it gets thoroughly mixed, by a rotating screw. The clay is then forced through a restricted opening, where it is broken up. The clay on leaving this hole falls down a vertical shaft, where a vacuum pump sucks the air out of the clay. We then come to the final stage of mixing the clay and forming it into brick shapes. The clay is forced by a rotating screw attached to a pug mill along into a rectangular hole, which forms the bricks shape. Once it is forced through this hole, the formed bricks travel by conveyer belt to drying ovens. Here they are left to dry, before being stacked ready for loading and finally delivery.

Diagnosis of the problem: This is where the contrast with the Layman's Guide was very helpful. First, What range of experience and knowledge? Whereas the girl student had personal experience in some depth to draw on, this writer has only external public knowledge of a complex process, offered in a simplified diagram. He has got to interpret the explanatory phrases to make sense of the diagram; she understood the process and produced diagrams to help to explain it.

Thus, this is not the kind of situation in which the writer is likely to feel an expert, even though he is invited to take on that role - and maintain "an informal, friendly style" to an audience less knowledgeable than himself.

Finally, although he is writing a text it is meant to sound like spoken English. Moreover, while the diagram is static, his commentary has to sound as if it is accompanying the visitors through headphones as they move round the works.

In the light of this analysis we would expect to find problems under any one of the remaining criteria! Let us look at audience, as a crucial instance.

What audience in mind? An audience going into a brick factory is probably going to start by wondering what exactly the machine is that they are staring at, and what its function is in the complex process of brick making. A "rotating screw", a "pug mill" and a "vacuum pump" are not exactly self-explanatory. To encourage a lay audience you would look for ways of simplifying and explaining them. However, for the moment, the best this student can do - working from ignorance himself - is to cling on to the terms in the diagram. He does his best to fill out the bare bones, but even here it is almost inevitable that he keeps to the register the diagram suggests, adding "horizontal shaft", and "rotating screw", for example, to the already technical vocabulary.

So much for words, what about sentences?

- "it gets thoroughly mixed"
- "then forced through a restricted opening"
- "where it is broken up"
- " a vacuum pump sucks the air out of the clay"

In all these examples, not surprisingly the writer repeats the phrases from the diagram, stringing them together as best he can. Because of this dependence he is not in a position to consider when an audience would like to

know why these things are happening, and the part they play in the overall process of making a brick. Why suck air out of the clay, for example?

The only scope the student finds for trying to take the audience's interests and needs into account is in the two short opening paragraphs - where he is free of the diagram, and has a chance to imagine himself into the situation. Indeed, it is quite a promising opening in its friendly manner - though by the second paragraph the constraints are beginning to tell.

Lessons to be learnt for teaching and assessing.

We acknowledge that it is not always possible to offer students a real situation in which to learn to write for everyday purposes. Nor will they always be able to draw on extensive first-hand experience. So simulation is almost certain to be needed. However, this interesting example highlights some of the problems and dangers of this approach. In choosing or designing a simulation, therefore, we suggest that teachers need to consider each of the following points:

(i) Resources Handling technical data on processes that are quite outside their experience puts students in the weakest possible position. There are many other situations in everyday life - those involving people making decisions, for example - where students can bring some kind of experience to bear, though even here it may constitute a very big demand on their imagination to put themselves into the place of those people. In that case, drama and introductory role play will be essential.

For simulations that move into the unknown (so far as students are concerned), the range and depth of the material that is offered has to help students get inside the experience and relate it to what they know.

(ii) Internalising the language and the situation When a film or television programme is used to introduce the simulation, it may well be easier for the student to relate to it. However, when real life is simplified and reduced to diagrams with accompanying text, it may be much harder to penetrate, being so much more abstract and removed from concrete experience.

What does this tell us? First, that audio-visuals are an important resource, offering a quick entry into an experience. Second, that with more abstract material, like written documents and diagrams, time will have to be set aside for students to talk it over, try out roles, ask and answer questions in role, make notes, possibly consult further

information (from people or books) - in other words, time to internalise. This does take time, and a variety of strategies is needed if the students are to make sense of the experience.

(iii) Audience and role. As we have seen, a further problem with simulation is for students to be able to imagine an audience which they can instruct, explain to, inform or advise... To understand the audience's needs these may have to be built into the role play - in the questioning, for example. Teachers have to think very carefully of the language demands this implies. First, there is the language of the resources - how technical, abstract or complex are the students going to find it? Second, what kind of shifts in language are demanded if the students are going to adapt their own language and the language of the resources, to the needs of a particular audience? - interested layman, a fellow expert, a friend...

* * * *

3. Voluntary Service

Students moving into complex and hitherto unknown experiences in real life are not likely to be able to take on the role of expert. However, this does not prevent them from observing, reflecting and reporting on their experience in ways that may well inform, advise, describe and explain - from a personal point of view - for the benefit of other people who might become interested. Voluntary service in a mental hospital offers a good example, as we shall see. The writer's inexperience is not simply a deficit here, if the readers want to imagine how they might cope. There is an opportunity for the writer to retrace stages by which s/he came to terms with the unknown, and in so doing possibly to gain further, reflective insight.

As it happens, this report concerns the experience of helping people in a personal way. It illustrates the tip of an iceberg of similar reports, based on organised visits, work experience, community service and more accidental encounters (for example on holiday).

In this case the complete report runs to rather over 5000 words. We selected for the seminar three of the early sections.

3 (a) The Volunteeer

Some of the volunteers who go and help at Hollymoor belong to an organisation known as the League of Friends or W.R.V.S. who provide valuable supporting services. Others are men and women who do not belong to any organisation; I myself come under this category.

I first became involved in community service about five and a half months ago, when at school. Mrs. Long a teacher asked who would be interested in doing something different than games on a Monday afternoon. She called it community service, she herself belonged to the League Of Friends and had found it a rewarding experience.

A meeting was held and she explained that sixth formers in the past had gone to hospitals, schools, old peoples homes etc to go and help once a week instead of doing games. Its not that I don't like games I thoroughly enjoy playing rounders and going swimming etc but I felt I wanted to help some one and it would be a very interesting experience. My ambition is to become a nurse and to visit a mental hospital regularly intrigued me.

I don't know what I expected because I've never been to a mental hospital and only had a short stay in a normal hospital, so I didn't have any ideas what it was going to be like. When thinking about it I could easily imagine dark, cold cells with massive padlocks on the barred doors to keep the patients in!

Another girl in my year (Dawn) also wanted to visit a hospital. So we were sorted out to go to 'Hollymoor Hospital, Northfield.'

The other pupils were organised to go and help at near by schools to help the children learn to read.

I was looking forward to next Monday with an open mind!

What purposes? There is an interesting mixture here of relatively impersonal explanation (in the first paragraph, for example) and a personal account. In reporting on a personal experience, the writer indicates how she became involved: "Its not that I don't like games...but I wanted to help some one.. My ambition is to become a nurse." She explains her reasons for volunteering, perhaps "anticipating an audience who might think it strange", as one of the seminar commented.

What audience in mind? The writer assumes an audience less knowledgeable than she is (at the time of writing) about voluntary support services, perhaps someone of her own age whom she may be trying to interest, and even advise. While she appears impersonal at times - "A meeting was held" - she nevertheless has a feeling for techniques of raising the reader's

interests and expectations:

- I don't know what I expected
- I could easily imagine dark, cold cells
- I was looking forward to next Monday with an open mind!

What organising principles? Formally, the main structure is a narrative:

- I first became involved
- Mrs Long a teacher asked
- A meeting was held
- So we were sorted out to go
- I was looking forward

However, until the end the chain of events is not the main focus: it is a frame filled out by introducing information, explanations, and later on her thoughts and feelings about the experience to come.

What range of experience and knowledge? The narrative concerns a personal experience "five and a half months ago," and she tells it as it happened - as if ignorant of the outcome. But behind this there is a good deal of both personal and public knowledge gained since that time, and this cannot help but give her (now) a different kind of confidence in telling her story (then). Thus her ability to inform and even slightly to manipulate the reader, from time to time: the events are recalled with some degree of poise.

What specific uses of language? The language appears quite simple and appropriate to one of her peer group, say, whom she might be trying to interest. However, as a glance at the first clause in each paragraph will show, it is structurally varied, and flexibly under control. When she wants to be direct she can use casual forms effectively - "It's not that I don't like games." When there is no need to be personal the form is appropriate: "A meeting was held..." When she wants to dramatise the language changes: "imagine dark, cold cells with massive padlocks on the barred doors..." In general, as a narrator this student has learnt to offer her readers a wider view of the context while keeping them in touch with her personal feelings as the story unfolds.

3 (b) My First Visit to Hollymoor Hospital

On Monday afternoon around half past one we were introduced to Mrs. Nunnerley. This is the lady who is in charge of the Voluntary Services Department. She told us we would be helping in the Occupational Therapy Department known as the 'O.T'. We followed her through a maze of corridors until we turned off into a much smaller corridor and a small sign saying O.T. over a wide door.

The O.T. room is very long, at the far end there is a small room going off where the staff stay during their breaks and in an opposite corner there is another room where the toilets and sinks are.

Mrs. Nunnerley shortly left Dawn and myself to talk to the other volunteers. We soon knew who was who and then joined in with the activities. The record player was on playing Max Bygraves favourite tunes. A volunteer called Rita gave me a tamberine to shake while I looked around at the same time.

All around the room are chairs against the walls and tables running parallel to them. I should think at least forty people were occupying the seats. They were either singing, smoking, or talking to each other and about six were dancing in a small circle in the centre of the room. The atmosphere was party like but I noticed some of the people were definitely not enjoying themselves.

None of the patients were very friendly except one who is called Tom. He came up to Dawn and myself introducing himself and wanting to know everything about us, he was very friendly indeed. The other person I remember most when first visiting, was Norman. He is about fortiesh, black hair badly needing a wash and a few green teeth poking out of his gums. His dirty clothes hanging on his small body. He really scared me and was very rude to us. We dared not look at him if we did he would stick his fingers up. He seemed to be very authoritive because he bossed all the patients around and they did what he said.

We were only there for about an hour and didn't really talk to any one - they were a bit hostile towards us. The other volunteers took the patients back to their wards telling us next week we'll be shown the routine.

What purposes? This is a narrative report on an experience. There is an ebb and flow here between conveying personal impressions and offering more impersonal observations and description. (It is difficult to decide, however, whether the rather odd detachment at times arises from the five and a half months' gap or from a certain naivety, and inability to involve herself.)

What audience in mind? As before, the writer neatly introduces the officials, Mrs. Nunnerley and Rita, "a volunteer", but this time she also offers a more detailed sketch of two of the patients, Tom and Norman. Similarly, there is

a brief indication of the layout of the O.T. Department before she tries to convey the appearance and the atmosphere of the room. The writer knows how to give the reader context as well as to focus on detail. (We'll notice later a problem this raises in her language.)

What organising principles? The overall structure is a narrative interwoven with descriptions of the setting and some of the characters. As a narrative it lacks a certain degree of particularly; for example, there is no direct speech:

- None of the patients were very friendly
- He came up...introducing himself and wanting to know everything about us
- He really scared me and was very rude to us
- he would stick his fingers up
- We...didn't really talk to anyone

These statements border on low level generalisation - typifying events rather than enacting them.

What range of experience and knowledge? After five and a half months there is every reason to be confident about the public knowledge you have internalised - the O.T. room and its environment. However, the gap in time will make it more difficult to recall significant impressions of that first encounter. This may be one reason why her personal impressions are at rather a general level. Equally, looking back at the encounter with Norman, for example, with five months' hindsight, the writer might have made more of interpreting that experience, and especially Norman's motives.

If the working of machines has to be explained, then experiences with people need to be sifted and reflected on.

What specific uses of language? What is new here is the use of description. The O.T. room is sketched in general terms:

- chairs against the walls...tables running parallel
- at least forty people...occupying the seats
- either singing, smoking or talking
- the atmosphere was party like
  but...(some) were definitely not enjoying themselves

The one specific detail is the group of six "dancing in a small circle".

The reader has rather a vague impression of what it was really like. With Norman, some things come out more sharply:

> - black hair - badly needing a wash - a few green teeth poking out - dirty clothes hanging

All of these are indirect signs of the writer's repulsion, and serve to explain why "He really scared me."

The other point we note is the writer's problem with describing a past event in a setting which is still "present" for her. Thus "we were introduced" but "This is the lady"; "we turned off" but "The O.T. room is very long." It's a fine point, but perhaps induces the more obvious slip in the last sentence: "took the patients back...telling us next week we'll be shown."

In general: This section is not intended to be an autobiography - it is clearly part of a larger report, designed to interest others. So it is appropriate that the scope should be limited. At the same time, we did feel in the seminar that it would have been valuable to the reader to try to convey the shock and confusion of this initial visit more vividly and personally.

3 (c) The Roles of a Volunteer Worker

At Hollymoor Hospital there are many roles a voluntary worker can have, for example here are a few that I think are important, because if volunteers didn't do these things the patients would be very frustrated. They would be bored, lonely and feal left out of life and have nothing to live for.

Making sure that long stay residents go out to the community centre and go for walks and taking residents into Northfield for an afternoons shopping or visiting. To take part in in the social activities evening entertainment and making sure those who can't get around to have their own entertainment in their wards in the hospital. To provide help, transport, entertainment or support for the clubs in the city and country linked to the hospital. To help in the hospital community centres and the shop. To befriend specific people who have no relatives or visitors. Making sure there is transport for outings, taking people out, bringing disabled or elderly relatives to visit. If requested be able to help in emergencies by the staff while perhaps there is staff illness or staff holidays. Being able to help in day-time activities on wards with classes or work projects organised by Occupational Therapy Department. To help with fund

raising activities such as the hospital fete, jumble sales and barbeques, christmas festivities and finally with afternoon teas on the wards.

Diagnosis of the problems: There is a sharp switch here in the uses of language. What we have is an impersonal list, setting out a number of roles for the voluntary worker. It seems entirely appropriate to include a section describing their roles within a topic of this kind: one hopes to find a variety of different aspects being discussed, especially as this gives the student an opportunity to gain confidence with different uses of language. (This is just what we found in the Jewellery Making.)

However, in our view, the writer is not clear enough why she has included this section for the reader. Within her opening paragraph there is a significant stance - an implicit appeal to the reader:

> if volunteers didn't do these things the patients would be... bored, lonely, and feel left out of life and have nothing to live for.

A reader who responded to these points of view sympathetically would feel let down by the brusque and perfunctory tone that follows.

Before starting on such a list the writer has to decide what s/he wants the reader to get out of it. Are these suggestions for things the reader could do? Are they illustrations of the very considerable dependance of the patients on other people's concern and good will? There is more than one way in which an interested reader could "use" the writer's knowledge. In its present form, however, it seems nothing more than bald information, as likely as not to turn the reader off.

If the writer had had a clear sense of what she had to offer a reasonably concerned reader in this section, she would have been more likely - among other things - to order it more effectively (avoiding repetition), and to make each of the activities more interesting, showing their value to the patients.

In writing to inform, instruct or explain, students need a clear sense of their role. Too often they have been entirely on the receiving end of such language in school, with no opportunities to gain confidence in using it for themselves. Until you have had an audience regularly listening to you with interest, it is hard to imagine the needs of interested readers as you write. This is why giving short prepared talks on these topics, and discussing

drafts with actual readers (such as their classmates) can be so important.

* * * *

4. Newspaper Report

In this example the student is producing "a newspaper report of an archaeological excavation for the readership of a newspaper such as 'The News of the World'".

EXCAVATION MYSTERIOUS FINDS

An excavation of four long barrows, which began on July 4th, has just been completed by Professor John Mortimer and a group of his students. The excavation took place in the area famous for Stonehenge and other such places, so everyone's expectations were high even before the dig began.

GRAVE WARNINGS

The dig was strenuous and like most sensible people, Professor Mortimer left the digging to his students, two of whom were injured after falling into a deep excavation pit. Could this have been a warning to stop any further steps in the excavation? It is not unlikely, for mysterious accidents and deaths also occurred during and after the excavation of King Tutenkamun's tomb in Egypt.

DISCOVERIES

The first two barrows which were excavated between the 6th and 30th July presented the eager students with a collection of stone axe-heads, bone-pins and antler picks. To an untrained person, these would obviously have been great finds, but to the archaeologists they were no surprise. The types of instrument are common finds in the area.

UNEXPECTED FIND

For Professor Mortimer and the other archaeologists, the third barrow held an unexpected surprise. A necklace made from stones found only in Derbyshire was found. This, in fact, shows that there must have been a north-south trade route which was, up until now, unknown.

MUTILATED SKELETONS

In the fourth and final long barrow, the most exciting find of the whole dig was uncovered.

Two skeletons, one male and one female were found entwined. Both had brutally smashed in skulls. Had a jealous third person murdered them?

No-one will ever know, for after they had been carbon-dated, they were again laid to rest in the barrows.

The excavation was closed last Wednesday, the 4th September. Professor Mortimer was extremely pleased with the discoveries which had been made and declared the dig a great success.

When we analysed this article in the seminar some very interesting questions were raised - especially about the submission of pieces like this for assessment. What exactly is a teacher hoping for when asking students to write such a piece? The student seems to be drawing on a limited input of public knowledge which s/he has been given, and not personal experience. So we are back in a parallel situation to "From Clay to Bricks": this is a simulation.

What is the purpose of such a simulation? Is the student learning to inform, or to entertain, or to sensationalize, or to amuse? - or a mixture of all of these? If a mixture is expected then the informative intention is likely to be strictly limited. If on the other hand the intention is to sensationalize, what exactly are we trying to teach? Do we want to give an imprimateur to this kind of writing?

As it happens, this student has simulated journalism quite well - the article is witty, quite well organised, throws in a touch of spookiness, and plays effectively with expectations (perhaps for a rather highbrow column of the "News of the World"!)

Play with language is one effective way of learning how to engage with and control a new range of styles. What's more, in this case it may have a further aim. Simulating a newspaper article - writing from the inside, as it were - helps you to understand more about the intentions and (ab)uses of language in different kinds of journalism, and thus to greater perception as a reader of the Press.

Ideally, then, the seminar felt that they would like to see such a piece in a larger project on "aspects of communication", perhaps including advertising, radio interviews, and magazines, and looking at such things as clichés, registers, casual-formal style, tone etc. To sum up, then, they wanted to relate the production of an article like this to the study of language in use (including its reception.)

PART 3

What kinds of understanding for teachers?

Purposes in mind

The eight pieces we selected for the seminar illustrated some, but by no means all, of the purposes in this kind of writing. Contrary to our own early hunches, we were struck by two facts:

(a) Within a longer enterprise, such as a layman's guide, different sections had different overall or dominant purposes.

(b) Nevertheless, even within each section the purpose frequently shifted, albeit briefly.

On reflection, this is not so surprising. The problem is that as teachers we have been too conditioned to thinking that what students write on a given occasion should be narrowly single-minded, viz EITHER instructions OR explanations OR advice OR reports... Maybe such narrow demands do occur in everyday life; we are not suggesting there is no virtue in answering them when they do. But as teachers we need to be more flexible, and to recognise the complexity of demands a reader may want to have answered, even on a single topic.

In fact, we initially framed those demands - or some of them - in the form of questions (ppl&2) How do you do it? - How does it work?... This is probably a very good way of helping students to realise that in this kind of writing readers have natural expectations and demands. Students will be aware of some of them but will need help in teasing out others. (Consider, too, how different the audience's expectations and demands are in reading fiction, or listening to personal stories.)

ADVICE TO STUDENTS: Be clear about why you are writing this piece, and the sorts of questions you are trying to answer. Informing, advising and explaining - like all such transactions - are two-sided processes. People want to know things; you want to tell them.

Writer's role and type of audience

In the pieces we have looked at, and others in the folders, some writers were able to draw on specific expertise, an investigation they had under-

taken, or practical tasks they had carried out. This gave them a natural role. They felt they had something to offer. Writers who lack such expertise, have not mastered the topic or feel they can't sort it all out inevitably flounder (as we've seen). They have no confidence in their role.

That is half the story when writers pick up their pens. The other half depends on their understanding the needs and interests of their likely readers (their "sense of audience"). Since the publication of The Development of Writing Abilities 11-18 (2) teachers have learnt to look more carefully at the implicit (or explicit) audience for any piece of writing. Indeed, development in writing is directly related to a writer's understanding of audience needs. And we have already seen writers at 17+ trying (with varied success) to address different audiences: a layman, visitor to a factory, a peer-group friend possibly, and the readership for a particular newspaper.

What range of roles and audiences would a teacher try progressively to encourage a student to take on? In preparing for the seminar we tried to compile a short list of some of the most important examples. In doing this we tried to sketch out the writer's responsibilities to the reader, and the sorts of key questions students should bear in mind:

(i) Expert to layman: this implies that the writer has a complex understanding. The main task therefore is to simplify the way the information is conveyed, and possibly to try to interest the reader, finding the best ways to appeal to potential concerns. Complex and technical language have to be avoided, on the whole, or glossed. "How to convey?" is a key question.

(ii) More experienced person to beginner: very similar to the first category but possibly without great expertise. There may be an additional responsibility to select in the beginner's interests. "What s/he needs to know?" becomes a key question.

(iii) Writer to peers: this assumes equal knowledge and experience. A major demand lies in sustaining the reader's interest. "How to keep involved?" is a key question.

(iv) Writer to wider(mixed) readership: A complex of questions is raised: "What common interests (or needs) to appeal to?" "What common knowledge to assume?" And perhaps "How best to involve?"

(v) Writer to selected (group of) reader(s): the writer needs to consider

the specific interests of the audience and constraints of the task. Young children, motor-bike enthusiasts, people with reading handicaps, parents or other groups defined by a specific interest are included here. The key questions vary, and always need explicit consideration.

ADVICE TO STUDENTS: Think about where you start from (in terms of knowledge, understanding, terminology etc.) and where the readers are starting from. How do you get them from where they are to something nearer your understanding?

Questions of organisation

When we look back at the selected pieces they are organised in a variety of ways: an argument, a list, a set of instructions, an explanation of a process, a narrative report... Each form of organisation sets up special demands to sort out the material, give it coherence, and find the appropriate language to do so. In a sense this is one of the vital things we are helping the student to learn - in order both to discover and crystallise for themselves what they really know, and to convey it to others in a lucid and coherent way. Often, only writing can do this effectively.

Perhaps a useful way of looking at this type of writing will be to consider how any given piece is ordered and organised overall. Thus:

a) Is the overall organisation a list? This indicates that the items all share some common feature. But it may imply more. In the elementary list the order is not significant; in more complex forms, there may be a temporal, logical or hierarchical ordering of ideas. In their day to day interest in language, English teachers tend to look down their noses at anything that is not "continuous prose". But in fact much information is best listed, from the equipment needed for a task to the advantages and disadvantages of each brand in a "Which?" survey. (Tables and matrices are important ways of listing information - and learning from it.)

b) Is the overall organisation narrative? This is commonly found in reports of visits and other forms of investigation carried out personally by students. A narrative in such cases can be an excellent device to take the reader in from the beginning of an enterprise (when you, the writer, are relatively ignorant), moving you and the reader through to greater knowledge and understanding. Its correctness and its personal perspective also help to draw the

reader in. (3)

How do such narrative reports differ from the personal stories of our first 16+ booklet (4)? In narrative reports a major part of the intention is to observe other people, their situation and their activities. Sometimes this is done impersonally; but writers also have the choice of including themselves in the action, as a participant, and thus conveying the personal impressions evoked by the situation and the people. When they do so, they may well move beyond factual recording to offering insights, interpreting, evaluating and giving advice. Thus the overall intention differs from personal stories: the primary focus is not on an individual narrator, but on reaching some understanding of a situation or a group of people.

c) Is the overall organisation a set of instructions? These will give details about how to proceed, or carry through a process. The basic information is a sequence of commands to follow. In simpler examples these may be listed; in complex examples, with branching alternatives, a flow diagram (algorithm) may be necessary. Flow diagrams are currently spreading through public administration and industry in an effort to convey complex procedures in as foolproof a manner as possible. They simplify the steps to be taken, thus making the procedure more comprehensible.

d) Is the overall organisation an explanation of a process? In this case each step in a sequence is connected to form a logical chain, leading from cause to effect (from mixing petrol with air, say, in order to form an explosive mixture, to driving the wheels on the car). The point is that overall the writer has to make clear a chain of causal links (in order to... so that... as a result...). Often accompanying diagrams are essential.

ADVICE TO STUDENT: First decide on the overall organisation, bearing in mind what you want to convey. Outline notes and diagrams will often help to recognise the skeleton framework. Then think of the best ways to lay out the information for your intended audience - verbally and visually.

The interplay between experience and new knowledge

Finding out that students might like to say something - and discover that they have experience to draw on - is half the art. Then with the confidence

that they have something to say, students can learn to handle these forms of language in use. Having done so, they also stand to learn that there is more to be found out, from public sources, to add to their personal knowledge. But relating this new public knowledge to what they already know takes time, and working through. It's here that a teacher can help by making the opportunity for students to collate what they read, to talk over new information, to select from it in answer to questions, to organise it in personal notes and discuss these with others (reshaping them in the process).

It is the quality of this interplay between personal experience and new knowledge that determines whether the student learns something about this topic in the course of learning to take on a role for an audience.

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